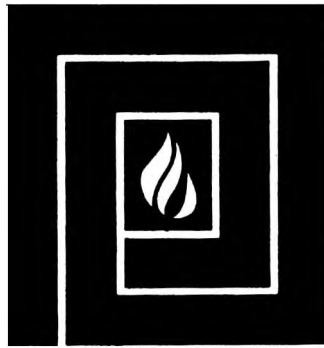


THE
ALEMBIC
SPRING



**TO THE PRESERVATION OF
OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

THE ALEMBIC



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ART

COVER

NANCY CLARK

CRYSTAL FANTASY

*While napalm burns in weedfires
far from the destroyed appliance mart
the madness strangles belief in repentance.
"This is the last time." scribble somewhere
in the underground fall-out shelters,
scour from the pregnant soul the majestic
motive for power; the one intention
born in diabolic ecstasy, spread
like a medieval plague in
prey of the phantasmic pig – power.*

*Then the clown, costumed in the sawdust
of human agony and demonic power
chants, "Dona, dona, dona eis!
Deducant te angeli to love and fantasy."*

*The sky vollies pink lace and soft thoughts
like thunderbolts full of cowardice,
greenhouse flowers are shipped to fancy rooms,
fireplaces giggle like its warmth
would melt the ice-caps of the globe,
while maidens dream of canopy-beds
and shining brass throughout
reminding her of maleness.
Pulsating eyes come together
as fingers touch in the singular quest for chocolates.*

*Out of the abyss of silent strawberry air
properly customed words emerge
constrained and artificial, almost unreal
as he is paralyzed by the absent taste
of her opium lips; and she dreams of
seducing his shoulders in muscular melody.
Both of their souls anguish, "When?"
and behind each made up word is, "Not yet!"
Like the philharmonic before the concert
when dissonance reigns, beauty will come, but not yet.*

*The clown rolls over to herald in the tent
“It’s Valentine’s Day! In paradisum!
Romance refreshes the mounds of earth!
Requiem aeternam, dona, dona, dona!”
Idiotic utterances break from his oracle:
“Do you remember the blizzard of Valentine’s Day?
How the snows fell spargens sonum softly,
refrigere, refrigere your cosmos
of the Prince and the others who suffer.
Can you dance without music?
Can you dance without music?”*

*How prisoned he is leashed to daily
newspaper clippings of crisis, crime
and comic strips, all before his television’s
village square of war, starving
babies and immolated youths,
while free from meditating solitude
(the medicine of questioned mysteries, such as these)
like a wintry scared squirrel hiding
happily somewhere with his nuts,
knowing inside he suffers the outside of suffering man.*

*And now there is another song
which clothes the one before it
with armour hammered silver and
swords slung slanted from the side
of warriors far from philosophic thought.
How methodic the game proceeds
moving firstly with the pawns
rooks flanked on the sides of
the knights, bishops, and queen
all protecting the power of the king.*

*Slowly military formations build
on the rectangular fields of the world
where at least two enemies joust
entangled in defenses behind charging fronts
and they both say, "This will be the last time."
Like children caught in mischief of
forbidden chess games on parlor rugs.
Big eyes look up at parents and plea,
"We are sorry, never again,
"We are sorry, never again,
Climb from the veranda of rotten marble
down to adobe huts where powerlessness
lay barren beneath squash sociology
measured out in putrid meal
mashed sacred by fat homophiles
sipping scotch with cheeses on wafers.
Look upon the peasant poor
mixing his gasoline cocktails
which guerilla servants will serve
to sober the power drunk junta.*

J.A. PARILLO

SAINT CAROLINA

We stopped once more on the Jimmylast Road about four miles above the harbor at the Bloody Nose, and the three of us crawled across the painful, gravel lot, through the door and across the bright and dirty tile of the floor inside, making our way over to one of those booths near the kitchen, and Phibole and his wife come out through the doors and talked with us for awhile, asking how we was and everything before going back into the kitchen.

It was about three o'clock in the morning, but there was quite a few people in there, all taking their eggs scrambled and hash, and all talking in sort of low tones because of the hour. They all stopped eating for awhile when we come in, being surprized at the way we crawled along the floor; but when they seen that we wasn't strangers to Phibole, they knew we were alright, though a few of them kept staring down at the thin trail of blood that Suitshoulder had made across the floor with those open sores down on his stump. But then they was asking for a story because one of them had noticed the bullet straps across our shoulders, and was wanting to hear of our travels; so when we had left off from eating, and after Phibole's wife, Ann, had cleared the things away, we gave them one of those Land of Dan Tales with Benziger working the harp real nice and me and Vinny acting out the parts of two men lost in the false white snow of winter, tramping and tramping, hard of foot, over the snow, making Dead Lady Sod in the northern thaw.

Well, they was all looking perplexed about the story and began to question us as to who we was and where we come from and such things, and the air was getting heavy with all the abuse that was beginning to come our way, and Vinny Suitshoulder was messing up the booth considerable with his sores, so we let ourselves out the backdoor, Phibole screaming all over the place that we'd given his restaurant a bad name.

Out in the truck we put oatmeal to Vinny's sores and they was all cleared up nice by the time we'd made the four miles down to the harbor.

Everybody was down on the landing, waiting to be carried onboard the old herring boat the club had chartered for the trip out to Saint Carolina. All the wheelchairs was stacked up toward the bow, and the men was being carried up the plank and set down under a dull green canope, where they sat quietly and watched as the others was brought up the plank. The sun was just now coming up over the tailend of the harbor, all maresblood and beautiful; and now all the men on the benches watched it rise, all of them quiet and happy like children.

We wouldn't let them carry us onboard. It was a narrow plank and wobbly, but me and Benziger was able to make it across without help from anyone. Me and Benziger have that one good leg and don't usually have trouble getting around; but Vinny Suitshoulder don't have no legs at all, so what he'll do in a case like this is, he'll brace hisself up on his arms and start rocking back and forth until he's swinging nice, and then he'll cast off with his arms and glide through the air for a distance. But, like I said before, that plank was wobbly like a springboard, and what it done was, it sprung Vinny up in the air about ten feet on the rebound; and when he come back down, the plank wasn't where it should have been, and Vinny fell into the water between the boat and the landing. They fished him out and wrapped him in a nice blanket, and everyone clapped like he was a hero when they brought him up under the canope.

As soon as we pulled away from the landing, everyone called for his gun to get in some practice on the brakes that was always following the boats out of the harbor. You might imagine the noise there was with all thirty-six of us opening up on anything that even resembled a brake, and the boys toward the middle of the benches was having their troubles, trying to get off a clean shot without a whole lot of noses and ears getting in the way. But there wasn't any of us wounded badly. It sort of reminded us of the war.

It was all a heavy fog outside the harbor, and a few of us was sick when the boat would lift and fall with the swell and there wasn't anymore brakes and everyone put their guns away and everything was quiet except for the droning of the engine below our feet and I sat holding my stomach and we made a wide turn around the ledges and the sun was burning through the fog and Saint Carolina was looming and the trees and rocks wasn't in the right place and we all just sat and watched the island loom and forgot.

WAY McDONALD

CHILDREN'S POETRY

The following poems have been collected from students of Shaw Junior High School, Philadelphia, and James L. McGuire Elementary School, Providence. Thanks to Jay Bruce Jacoby and Chris Duclos for providing the ALEMBIC with these wonderful poems. [Editor]



LOVE

Love is in the air that we breathe;
Love is in the heart;
Love comes and goes;
Love never stays;
Love can't be seen, but can be felt;
Love is a four letter word that means a lot.
Love comes from your heart;
Love is a feeling that you get;
Love is when someone special comes and
never goes.

VICTORIA WILLIAMS

IT'S MY THING

Everybody has their own thing,
But to me mine has a special ring.
It's success in life
And to live it right
Without fuss or frown
'Cause it's my thing
And nothing can get me down.

SHARON SANDERS

I WALK WITH GOD

Jesus on my right, God on my left –
Which on do I like best?
I think I will choose Jesus, the son of God.
For you see, I do not care much for this man
called God,
For He makes people who can't walk, talk, think,
or drink –
This man called God.

For He is so powerful, so mighty, so tall;
Equalled by none, yet loved by all.
He lives in a place called heaven –
A mansion for saints,
Where all good people come
To meet and congregate.

Oh! There's a place for bad people too.
This place is called Hell.
It's hot and stuffy and very crowded.
You get a uniform too –
A pair of wings and a pitchfork.
What do you do?
Why you go around sticking people
In the behind through and through.

DONALD EDINGTON

I have a moose.
His name is Bruce.
He likes to hide
Among the Spruce.

My silly moose,
Whose name is Bruce,
Got loose and hid
Among the Spruce.

Now silly Bruce,
Who is a moose,
Is loose somewhere
Among the Spruce.

MARION HONORE

THE PIG

I have a pig
That digs and digs
He digs for mud everyday
What can his name be anyone
So I can put him on display.

ROBIN JONES

SPIRITS

Gee I wish that I could fly
Up into the bright blue sky.
Shadows high and shadows low,
Not knowing where's a place to go.
When I reach the highest cloud,
Ugly spirits will be saying out loud:
"Go home you animal, go home you beast,
Before we spirits have a feast!"
Then I felt that I should cry;
I don't wish that I could fly.

PEARL BROWN

"CATS"

"Cats!" "Cats!" What about cats?
All that they do is purr and chase rats.
Oh no, you're wrong!
Different cats do different things.
The big ones do a lot of things.
They eat all kinds of meat, they do.
And if they're hungry, they'll eat you too.

DERRICK COKER

THE LITTLE VISITOR

Only around at night
(So's not to bring fright
To him and the house)
He's just a tiny mouse.

Tapping around for cheese;
Doing just as he please.
He'll eat crumbs, what's ever handy:
To him, crackers are like candy.
I hope we never have that visitor
He scares me half to death
But, anyway, really
He's nothing but a pest.

SHEILA WOOD



GOD

God made fleas and God made seas;
God made you and me.

ROBERT GRAVES

FEET

Bigger than hands with
a smell that's not weak.

DERRICK COKER

MY DOG DINK

My dog Dink –
He drank a bottle of ink;
His face and tail turned pink,
And then he started to stink –
My poor big dog named Dink.

ALFRED NOTTINGHAM

THE COMIC BOOK

When does a person buy a comic book?
When he doesn't have money to buy
LIFE or LOOK?
What's so interesting about the inexpensive
things?
Why it's the science fiction contraptions
and things.

DERRICK COKER

From dawn the day comes;
From dusk the night comes;
When the night is halfway at
An end you will know
That light will soon appear.

Some people think that
The day is gayer than
The night, but I
Myself like both.

FELECIA GREEN



CAT

I have a cat
That eats rats.

RAT

I have a rat
that eats cats.

ANTHONY HINTON

CLIFF

From here to there, and there to here
We are all sniffing poison air.
We knew of a man whose name was Cliff,
Of city air he took a whiff;
He didn't have a handkerchief
To strain the air he chanced to whiff;
And now poor Cliff is cold and stiff.

DARRYL HARRIS

MY EASTER RABBIT

One Easter it was kind of funny.
Because I got a big chocolate bunny.
Most of him was all white
And he posed like he was going to fight.

But one day I said to myself.
I've got to eat him before he melts.
But when I got there it was too late,
He did already disintergrate.

DAVID GENDREAU

FOOTBALL

My favorite thing to do
On Saturday morning at 8:02
Is play a lot of football
And run and jump and fall.

TOMMY KING

A GREAT DOGGY

That great littly doggy,
That lovingly beast
With a star in one eye,
Gives a leap in the East.

He dances allright
All the way through the West,
And never drops once
On his forefeet to rest.

I'm a poor little doggy,
But tonight I will bark,
With the great overdoggy,
That romps in the dark.

D.M.



INK STAINS UPON A SOGGY BLOTTER

by VINCENT CLARK

CHARACTER OF "STACIE RHEE"

by DEBBI BISCONI

(The scene is a Brooklyn pier, sometime in the early afternoon. There is a table in the Upstage area, representing a crate, and two poorly arranged chairs. Seated on stage is Stacie Rhee, who is nervously fingering a dog's leash. She fidgets about and throws an occasional glance to her wrist watch. She is very well dressed and her face is generally expressionless and dignified when talking to people. Enter, from Downstage Right, Billy Keefer. He is dressed in a black shirt and pants, with a dark, woolen cap. He is unkempt and exhausted. He carries a paper lunch bag. After entering, he notices Stacie. For some reason, he is embarrassed by her presence and nervously looks around for some escape. Seeing that there is none, he silently creeps along the Upstage wall and inches down into the corner made by the crate and the Upstage wall. He doesn't look up at the girl across the stage, but merely opens his bag and begins to lunch by himself. Stacie does not notice Billy, but after a moment, she springs from her chair and paces the stage. She notices Billy in the corner, and after giving him a disdainful look, sees that there is nobody else to talk to, and gradually crosses over to him.)

STACIE: Excuse me! (*Billy looks up at her with a start.*) Could you tell me when the passengers will be allowed to board the "Oceantic"?

BILLY: (*After stumbling for a moment.*) Uh . . . It'll be a good twenty minutes yet.

STACIE: (*Outraged.*) Twenty minutes! Do you know how long I've waited around here already?

BILLY: (*Cringing into the corner.*) Well . . . I . . .

STACIE: An hour and a half! I don't see why they won't let us on board the stupid boat when we want to.

BILLY: (*Very embarrassed by the whole thing.*) I guess that . . .

STACIE: Do you know that they wouldn't even let me take my dogs along with me? Do you know where my poor dogs have to ride all during that long trip to England?

BILLY: (*Simply.*) In baggage.

STACIE: (*As if Billy had not answered her question.*) In baggage! Four of the finest pure bred canines in the country, and the stupid vice-president of the line wouldn't let them travel with me.

BILLY: Well, I don't know any shippin' line that . . .

STACIE: And then there's those idiotic Custom's men.

BILLY: (*Giving up.*) Yeah! There sure are!

STACIE: (*Indignantly.*) Why, they treated me like a common criminal all the time I've been here. I packed everything so carefully; so, so carefully. Then do you know what they did? (*Billy shakes his head.*) They just tossed everything out of the case. My shoes, my dresses, my . . . (*She just manages to avoid saying something embarrassing. Billy looks away in an attempt to escape his chagrin. Both are clearly embarrassed.*) . . . and everything else.

BILLY: (*In an attempt to avoid appearing stupid.*) Well . . . They gotta do that. I mean . . . like . . . if everybody just went by without . . . you know!

STACIE: (*A sudden realization.*) Oh! Am I bothering you?

BILLY: Uh . . . No! No, you ain't botherin' me.

STACIE: (*Composing herself.*) If I seems to go on about this business, you'll understand that I've been ridiculously treated since I've been here. And who knows what they've done with my poor little dogs.

BILLY: (*With a reassuring gesture.*) Oh, lady, we're real careful with all our cargo . . . especially with our animal cargo!

STACIE: Oh, I hope they were careful. I hope they were gentle with them.

BILLY: (*innocently.*) Who could be more careful than a longshoreman? (*Needless to say, this comment doesn't do much to ease Stacie's mind. She half turns and gives him a pained expression of dread.*)

STACIE: Oh! Are you a longshoreman?

BILLY: (*Mildly embarrassed.*) Well, yeah!

STACIE: (*Excited.*) Did you watch them load the "Oceantic"?

BILLY: Yeah! I was on the loading crew. We just got through with it.

STACIE: Did you see my dogs? There were four of them: an Afghan Hound, and Irish Wolfhound, a beautiful Doberman Pinscher, and a Great Dane.

BILLY: Well . . . no, but one of the other guys might 'o said somethin' about it.

STACIE: I've been waiting a whole year for the International Dog Show to open. If anything happens to ruin it now, I'll . . . (*She breaks off.*) Oh, you wouldn't believe the hard work I've done for those dogs. Why, I've given the better part of my life for a chance like this. I don't suppose that you know anything about it, but the International Dog Show in London is one of the greatest in the world. And with four entries, I stand an excellent chance of winning something. I might even win top prize. You know what that would mean? (*Billy shakes his head.*) It means that I'd be recognized as the greatest dog trainer in the world.

BILLY: Gee! That's great! (*This said very simply.*)

STACIE: I'm even writing a book about it!

BILLY: It?

STACIE: Why, dog training, of course!

BILLY: (*Chagrined.*) Oh!

STACIE: (*Proudly.*) And this one's going to be quite controversial.

BILLY: (*Puzzled.*) Controversial! About dogs?

STACIE: Why, certainly! (*Proudly.*) I've discovered dozens of unheard of innovations in my work with dogs. For example, what are your ideas about the discipline of canines?

BILLY: I dunno.

STACIE: You wouldn't believe some of the extremes that I've heard used. For instance, James Hiller suggest that to attract a dog's attention, you should call his name once, and then, if he doesn't answer, you should hit him on the nose with a blunt instrument. Can you imagine that! We're turning into a world of barbarians! And then there's the Von Wyck method. (*A gesture of disgust.*) She suggests that one should just keep calling his name until he comes, and if he doesn't come, sit there until he does. (*Indignantly.*) Extremists!

BILLY: (*Stranded for something to say.*) Well, what would you do?

STACIE: The only practical thing to do! You call once, then, if he does not answer, you walk over, take his chin in your hand, and jerk his head in your direction.

BILLY: Oh!

STACIE: (*Another realization.*) You don't know much about dogs, do you? (*This last remark has a physical effect on him. He shoves his hands in his pockets and starts to drift away from her.*)

BILLY: Well . . . I guess I know as much . . . I mean . . . well . . . no! I mean . . . not really!

STACIE: (*Disappointed.*) Oh! Well, I must say that I think that people who don't like dogs are cheating themselves of an experience. I mean, (*With a smile.*) there's no feeling in the world like being really loved by a dog. Me, I wouldn't give it up for anybody . . .

BILLY: (*Who has just drifted quietly over to his corner.*) Yeah, I suppose you wouldn't.

STACIE: (*Disdainfully.*) Hmmm! Well, if you'll excuse me! (*She turns with dignity and starts off right. But before leaving, she glances at Billy who has slumped into his corner and is now staring at the ground. It is obvious that he has been hurt in some way. She stares curiously at him, and then, after a moment's pause, she inches over to him.*) Pardon me! (*No answer.*) Excuse me! (*Billy fidgets for a moment and then hesitantly looks up at her.*) Is there anything wrong?

BILLY: (*Forcing a smile.*) No! Nothin' at all!

STACIE: You know, with all my talking, I forgot to ask you your name. (*Billy is shocked by this request, but after a moment, he gets to his feet.*) My name is Keefer . . . Billy uh William Keefer.

STACIE: (*Extending her hand.*) I'm Stacie Rhee. (*Billy takes her hand.*)

BILLY: Hi!

STACIE: (*As if to a child.*) I still have a few minues, would you care to sit down and talk for a while?

BILLY: (*Seeing that there is no escape.*) Well . . . I guess I can, for a few minutes.

STACIE: (*Still patronizing.*) Fine! (*She gestures to the chairs. Billy and Stacie sit. After a moment of hesitation, Stacie speaks.*) Well, Billy, how long have you been a longshoreman?

BILLY: (*Without looking at her.*) Seventeen years.

STACIE: (*Acting impressed.*) Well, I must say, you must know quite a bit about it.

BILLY: (*With a shrug.*) Nothin' to know.

STACIE: Oh, you're just being modest.

BILLY: I put the stuff on the ship, and I take the stuff off the ship. What's to know?

STACIE: (*Searching for a topic.*) Well, are you married?

BILLY: (*With an uneasy laugh.*) Oh, no, no!

STACIE: Any other family?

BILLY: Yeah, I live with my ol' lady.

STACIE: Anyone else?

BILLY: No, not any more.

STACIE: (*Coldly.*) Well, I do. (*Her features darken.*) I had parents who cared about as much for me as . . . (*She breaks off.*) Did you have any brothers or sisters?

BILLY: (*Straightening up a bit.*) I had a brother.

STACIE: (*Calling to him.*) Billy?

BILLY: (*Not looking at her.*) Yeah?

STACIE: (*She takes his chin in her hand and jerks his head to her.*) Tell me about him.

BILLY: *(Beginning to become a little more confident.)* O.K., I will. His name was Tony . . . Keefer. He could do anything, I mean anything! From football to trig, anything! And he was the best lookin' guy around, and most popular, too. *(A slight grin.)* But, even so, he always had a few minutes for me. And that's all I cared about, when I was a kid. Just that few minutes a day. But, even though we never talked about it, we both knew the score around the house, and around the neighborhood. It was Tony everything and Billy nothin'. *(Lowering his head.)* But, then he dies. *(Gesture of sympathy from Stacie.)* And then, I was all alone. *(Somewhat heated.)* And after that, everybody walked on Billy. Everybody! Bill was never a brain in school, so they chucked him out in sixth grade. *(Again Stacie's emotions are jarred, and expression becomes very compassionate.)* Billy was never a lover boy either, so they made smart aleck cracks about him. And Billy was never a good dock man, either, so they laughed at him. And after seventeen years, seventeen years, he is today where he was seventeen years ago when they hired him, in the hole. *(With an ironic laugh.)* That's the place for Keefer all right, the hole. Some guy must have told 'em I was comin' when they decided to call it that, man. *(Looks emotionally at Stacie.)* But, you know? You're different. *(Stacie starts to move away, but Billy reaches out and grasps her hand.)* No, I mean it! You're really somethin' else. Here I am, just a dock man eatin' lunch on the pier, and you with your clothes, your book, your money, and the whole thing, you just come over and start to talk. *(With a broad smile.)* No reason, you just come over and talk. *(Stacie starts to wriggle away.)*

STACIE: I'd better get to the ship.

BILLY: No, you got time. There's a lot I want to tell ya.

STACIE: *(Uneasily.)* I'm afraid I can't.

BILLY: *(Almost pleadingly.)* But . . .

STACIE: I've got a boat to catch. *(And with that, she turns to exit. But before leaving, she realized that she has left her leash. She turns to retrieve it, forcing her to take another look at Billy. She looks at him long and hard. Finally, she turns to exit, trying to look dignified, but her face is deeply emotional. After she leaves, Billy returns to his corner, and begins to slump down into it. But halfway down, he straightens up, his face still very much distressed.)*

DUCK

*There was just one wind all winter.
One pounding raw wind pushed
stakes of ice into the drifted
beach sand that tightened around
the driven snow.*

*Yet the beach held rippled in
flex against the wind.*

*On the spring beach the icy
snow thawed thickly in the sea sand.
I walked with sticky toes
upon a bird stabbed in the sand.
And I held my breath fearing
that it would grasp for the
one it had lost.*

*But it did not. It did nothing
in the sand.*

*In silence wild ducks made webbed
patterns in the softening sand.
Their toes stuck too.*

*All the things melted together on
the beach after the winter passed*

*All but the bird beneath the gleaming hilt.
It did not melt. It did not disappear.
The hilt hardened in cold relief against
the sunny sand laying there a memory
for the quiet summer life.*

ROBERT KELLY

BELOVED · COUNTRY

"I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country." (D.C.L.)

I. *The Act of Faith*

*The indescribable exhaustion which precludes
'Fatigue' might be the modern measure
Of America. Here the homeless and the
Afflicted are gathered, the torch burns white,
And laughter is the anti-dominant motif.
Breathless angels' shoulder burdens unmade
And bequeath evils bequeathed. Past rows
Of daisies and coles, off to war and peace,
They pass like ancient rimed couplets, seeking
A Heroism that left its mark on damp beaches
And bloody flags. Amid the running pain,
The gasping drains and funnels, all channeling
Emotions to an impasse, exist, eternally linking
The forwords and the epilogues of a whole cacophonous
Mass. The candles that in grief were burned,
The language that belied past the possible,
The marble inscribed funerals dressed in black,
Are all dead of godlike boredom. And we,
Caught in a trap that walls out even shadows,
Must be afraid to will the end to come.*

II.

Prayer

© God, Who holds the golden rule
And sways it gently o'er our heads,
Please to keep Thee near to me.
I pray that Thou, Who art not dead,
May lovingly bestow Thy grace
Upon Thy servant face to face
With Thee to be some day, I hope.
Amen.

III. The Consecration

H.A. (HOLY ANGEL) HELP ME.
ANGEL OF GOD
MY GUARDIAN DEAR
(SITTING ON MY SHOULDER HERE)
HARE KRISHNA.
THIS IS MY
LOVE, HAPPINESS, PEACE,
FLESH,
PEACE, HAPPINESS, LOVE,
LORD HAVE MERCY.
HAIL MARY,
WE BESEECH YOU HEAR US.
ALL WE ARE SAYING IS
THIS IS MY BLOOD
TO WHOM GOD'S LOVE COMMJTS.
BE AT MY RIGHT HAND, H.A.

*We ask the help of all present
in this perfect consumation.*

The first transformation.

One species is perfected.

The litany of our helplessness.

The second transformation.

*We pray for continued divine
guidance.*

IV. *The Blessing*

*The silence of moon is merely
The reflection of the sun. And the pool
That surrounds the castle is peopled by
Quixotic oxymorons, with glistening
Molars of the purest wax. Out, out,
Brief cares; decay will not prevail
Over a mouth that thinks for itself.
Pure, pure, the breath that bends the cautious tree,
Lying with more wit back behind the soft,
Sweet asphalt forest that we rape ne'er more.
Safe at last, oh sweet father, safe at last.*

Robert McIntyre
Printed by Nancy Clark

HERMAN MELVILLE'S *MOBY DICK*

In Melville's presentation of Ahab, we can detect a movement away from the imagery of regality and sanctity surrounding Ahab early in the book to a more satanic depiction of the captain as he nears his final confrontation with Moby Dick. It appears as though Melville wanted to gradually reveal the demonic aspect of Ahab's personality. But in so doing, Melville also adds a terrifying majesty to his central character, a cosmic dimension which elevates Ahab to a suitable level for combatting the god-like whale and produces the magnificent power of that tempestuous clash.

Before he even appears in the work, Ahab is cloaked in sacred mystery and religious overtones. Ishmael notes that upon leaving for the open seas, "Captain Ahab remained invisibly enshrined within his cabin." When after several days, Ahab has not yet appeared on deck, Ishmael can nevertheless sense his controlling presence, as the captain issues orders from his "sacred retreat."

Yes, there supreme lord and dictator was there, though hitherto unseen by any eyes not permitted to penetrate into the now sacred retreat of his cabin.

Earlier in the book, when Captain Peleg had told Ishmael about Ahab, we learned that, in addition to being the "good man" Peleg characterized him to be, there is an added force to his being. Ishmael notes:

... I also felt a strange awe of him; but that sort of awe, which I cannot at all describe, was not exactly awe; I do not know what it was. But I felt it; and it did not disincline me towards him, though I felt impatience at what seemed like mystery in him, so imperfectly as he was known to me then.

Melville here is foreshadowing the almost hypnotic power which we see Ahab exert over the crew later. The first description of Ahab's appearance is significant.

He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them . . .

It should be noted that Ishmael initially describes Ahab within the context of fire symbolism, a type of imagery which grows in significance as Ahab is revealed to us. When Ishmael sees Ahab before the crew, he observes:

... Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe.

The mystery surrounding Ahab continues as we see him force Stubb into submission solely through his overbearing will. Stubb's reaction is interesting:

... somehow, now, I don't know whether to go back and strike him, or — what's that? — down here on my knees and pray for him? Yes, that was the thought coming up in me; but it would be the first time I ever *did* pray. It's queer; very queer; and he's queer too.

In addition to his legitimate command, Ahab seems to exert an almost priestly influence over the crew, although Ishmael thinks of it in terms of regal power. Right after Stubb's musings, Ahab is depicted alone with his pipe. Ishmael notes:

How could one look at Ahab then, seated on that tripod of bones, without bethinking him of the royalty it symbolized? For the Khan of the plank, and a king of the sea, and a great lord of Leviathans was Ahab.

Indeed, Ishmael continually detects a royalty about Ahab but also something essentially undefinable, something supra-royal. After discoursing on emperors and kings in "The Specksnyder," Ishmael exclaims:

Oh Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it must needs be plucked as from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!

Perhaps that special element in Ahab is some religious dimension, some holy motivation or priestly function which Ahab assumes.

Ahab as a priest figure is most apparent in "The Cabin-Table" chapter where Ahab presides over the meal. Ishmael describes the ritual.

They were as little children before Ahab; and yet, in Ahab, there seemed not to lurk the smallest social arrogance. With one mind, their intent eyes all fastened upon the old man's knife, as he carved the chief dish before him. I do not suppose that for the world they would have profaned that moment with the slightest observation . . . Ahab motioned Starbuck's plate toward him, the mate receiving his meat as though receiving alms.

Again, Ishmael compares it all to a royal function ("like the Coronation banquet at Frankfort"), but the unwillingness to have "profaned" the moment, the receiving of the food "as though receiving alms," and the presentation of Ahab as a father-figure before his "little children" all add to a co-existing religious connotation to the meal.

In "The Quarter Deck," Ahab first captures the imagination of the crew with his quest for Moby Dick. He magically holds the crew in his power, subordinating their wills to his, inducing them to swear an oath to him. In his references to Moby Dick, he sketches the White Whale as total malignity, and, draped in the religious imagery we have already noted, Ahab seems to be leading a holy quest against evil. But there is an important undertone here, a foreshadowing of the more domenic Ahab to emerge. In offering the sixteen dollar piece to the first man to sight the White Whale, Ahab nails it to the mast.

"Huzza! huzza!" cried the seamen, as with swinging tarpaulins they hailed the act of nailing the gold to the mast.

This act has the outward appearance of a crucifixion and takes on meaning when we discover the significance of the doubloon to Ahab later. For in the chapter "The Dubloon," Ahab sees himself reflected in the coin's engravings.

The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn mirrors back his own mysterious self.

Ahab in all his majesty is reflected in that coin. If we now look back to the deck scene, not only do we observe Ahab being symbolically crucified in that nailing to the masthead, but we also realize that it is Ahab himself who is nailing the coin. It is Ahab who crucifies Ahab. In this symbolic act, Ahab is both sacred in his crucifixion and demonic in his crucifying. The emerging demonic Ahab has crucified the more holy and majestic Ahab who had dominated the work up to this point. From here on, the satanic Ahab overshadows all. In retrospect, the "crucifixion" scene can be viewed as the turning point in Melville's presentation of Ahab.

Immediately after that scene, Starbuck first seriously opposes his captain. He tells Ahab: "I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance." Starbuck now begins to function as a warning light, a balancing element trying to check the demonic possession beginning to enfold Ahab. In soliloquy, Starbuck worries over his own soul possibly being controlled by this "madman." He muses, "I think I see his impious end; but feel that I must help him to it." He will later warn his captain: "Let Ahab beware of Ahab; beware of thyself, old man." This admonition aims at the protection of Ahab from the satanic Ahab.

In his more lucid moments, Ahab himself can penetrate the maddened man he has allowed to dominate him. In soliloquy, he says,

Oh hard! that to fire others, the match itself must needs be
wasting! What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do!
They think me mad — Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am
madness maddened!

Note again the imagery of fire. He sees himself as a match, a producer of hellish fire, a characteristic of his demonic personality.

By the time we near the final chapters, Ahab has completely reversed his role as priest. In "The Forge," Ahab commits that blasphemous baptism of the harpoon.

"Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!"
deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly
devoured the baptismal blood.

In this act Ahab has reached the pitch of satanic madness.

In "The Candles," the fire imagery associated with Ahab builds up. The three spermacetti candles become the "Lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames" lighting the way to the White Whale. And in the following black ritual, Ahab worships the "clear spirit of clear fire." He links his existence with the fire.

Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true
child of fire, I breathe it back to thee.

As flashes of lightning strike, Ahab addresses the bolts of flame.

Leap! leap up, and lick the sky! I leap with thee; I burn with thee;
would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee.

It is after this satanic sacerdotal function that Starbuck cries out,

God, God is against thee, old man; forebear! 'tis an ill voyage! ill
begun, ill continued; let me square the yards, while we may, old
man, and make a fair wind of it homeward.

But in black defiance, Ahab takes a burning harpoon and reasserts his power over the crew, finally blowing out the flame to end the fire ritual.

In one of the final gams, Ahab exhibits a further separation from the Ahab depicted earlier. He listens to the story of the *Rachel's* captain and refuses to spend any time helping to search for the lost crewmen of that ship, including the captain's son. The *Rachel* is left to go it alone in the search; Melville paints the scene in biblical allusion: "She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were not." This rejection of the children by Ahab stands in direct opposition to the "Cabin Table" scene where a priestly Ahab leads his "little children," the crew, in the dinner. To this inhuman depth has Ahab fallen (or, conversely, has the demon risen).

While Ahab has degenerated from the royal and priestly captain dedicated to destroying the evil White Whale into a maddened demon defying the universe, the figure of Moby Dick has been developing in a different direction. Ahab may write him off as evil incarnate, but the Whale carries more subtle distinctions. There is that incredible malignity to which all who speak of him refer, but in addition we sense a special majesty and awesomeness to Moby Dick. Ishmael speaks of stories which had circulated attributing immortality to the Whale, as well as the possibility of omnipresence. In speaking of the Sperm Whale species in general on another occasion, Ishmael says,

In the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity
inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it,
you felt the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in
beholding any other object in living nature.

Later, Ishmael mentions that Moby Dick might be leading a large group of whales, "like the worshipped white-elephant in the coronation procession of the Siamese." All of these hintings at divinity finally flower in the grand appearance of Moby Dick before Ahab.

A gentle joyousness — a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness,
investing the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming
away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his
lovely leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth
bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in
Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the
glorified White Whale as he divinely swam.

Here there is no malignity but sheer magnificence. As Moby Dick descends

into the ocean, Melville writes, “the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight.”

Confronting this divine figure, we have Ahab, the fire-worshipper, the maddened Satan figure. But part of the greatness of *Moby-Dick* is that in the final three chapters, Melville puts us in awe of *both Moby Dick and Ahab*. In these chapters, the majestic futility of the quest is most apparent. We capture that great realization that for Ahab there is really no chance of defeating the whale. But herein lies the tragic greatness of Ahab. Though he will fail, he nevertheless does battle with this god. Though he will be inevitably tangled among those ropes, as he is caught in the threads of the Fates, he still fights on, even after the failures and omens of the first two days of combat. He temporarily suspends his own fate, and our own certainty of it. All he actually can do is delay the fates but in this very act he achieves his tragic dimensions.

What Melville might be saying in the end is that the emergence of the demonic Ahab was somehow necessary for this final conflict. If Moby Dick was gradually being invested with divine attributes, then the demonic element had to surface in Ahab. It is only a satanic character that can do battle with a god. On this level, it was quite natural, given the symbolic divinity of Moby Dick, for Ahab to develop in this direction.

But on the other hand, part of the book's ambiguity is that the White Whale might also symbolize that evil of which Ahab was convinced in his original desire to kill the Whale. If this is so, something of the early regal-sacerdotal Ahab is necessary for the final scenes, and this seems to be symbolically provided, once again, through the doubloon. For in spying the whale first, Ahab wins the doubloon, and, symbolically, wins back that majestic self which he had crucified upon the mast. On this level, Ahab pits himself in sacred battle against the evil White Whale, a struggle which is tragic in another way, for the evil the Whale symbolizes can never be fully destroyed. Again, Ahab is destined to lose. Indeed, it is the Whale who destroys Ahab.

It is this continual ambiguity interwoven throughout the book which raises it above mere allegory, leading to these unending questions surrounding the central symbolic elements of Ahab and Moby Dick. The emergence of the demonic Ahab, however, remains — one of the more crucial developments in understanding the book, and particularly the whirlwind of those final chapters.

NICHOLAS DiGIOVANNI

THE BOOK OF PEACE

Chapter 1

(The Lord appears to Adam.)

1 In recent times, the Lord came to Adam for an evaluation of peace on earth.

2 And on the day when Adam became worthy of being called a man, the Lord called forth Adam and appeared to him with a voice saying:

3 I have made you in My image and likeness.

4 And from this day, you will live accordingly.

5 Now, go about your business

6 And I shall call upon you on certain days for an evaluation of peace on earth,

7 And the Lord left Adam.

Chapter 2

(The Lord appears a second time and Adam misleads Him.)

1 Adam went about his business with pride and peace in the sight of the Lord.

2 And on a certain day the Lord came down into the house of Adam for an evaluation of peace on earth. And the Lord asked:

3 What is the human situation, Adam? and Adam answered:

4 You have made us in Your image and likeness and we live accordingly.

5 We take what we need from Your bounty with Your blessing

6 And all men live in peace here on earth.

7 After hearing this, the voice of God ascended to the heavens and the Lord was satisfied with the human situation.

Chapter 3

(A message from the rulers is sent to Adam.)

1 And Adam again went about his business, preparing himself for the complex society which man had built.

2 In the midst of his preparations, a message came to Adam's house from the rulers of his nation saying:

3 For the next two years, you will not be able to go about your business,

4 And you will not live according to the image and likeness of God,

5 And you will go to kill your fellow man in war.

6 Adam gave much thought to the message, for he knew what was the right thing to do.

Chapter 4

(Adam prays to the Lord.)

1 In the evening of this day, after reviewing the message from the rulers

2 Adam entered his house with sorrow and grief.

3 For Adam was coerced to repel the will of God in His sight . .

4 And Adam prayed to the Lord, his God:

5 O my God, why must I, now in Your service, violate Your will which is to live according to Your likeness and image?

6 O my God, why must I, now in Your service, go from my business to serve the rulers of my nation,

7 To kill my fellow man in war, which is against Your will?

8 But the Lord was not with him this night and He did not hear.

Chapter 5

(The Lord appears a third time and Adam does not mislead Him.)

1 And thirty days passed from that time; the Lord had ceased to be quiet.

2 And Adam heard the voice of the Lord ask again:

3 What is the human situation, Adam? And Adam answered:

4 I have sorrow in my heart and I have grief for mankind, my Lord, because we do not live in peace.

5 My God, why have you forsaken me? And the Lord replied:

6 What are you saying, Adam?

7 Was it not during your preparations when I came to you that you said all men on earth live in peace?

Chapter 6

(The Lord demands an answer and He consoles Adam.)

1 And the Lord had come to demand what the human situation was. Adam told the Lord:

2 The human situation on earth is sick and mad and men have not yet learned to live by Your likeness and image.

3 I am now compelled to kill my fellow man in war for the rulers of my nation and I must not abide in Your word for two years.

4 What will I do, Lord? And the Lord replied:

5 I have not forsaken you, Adam.

6 You must do what you know is good in the sight of the Lord.

Chapter 7

(Adam makes a decision.)

1 Adam had to decide whether to obey or not to obey the rulers. And Adam thought:

2 If I resist the calling of the rulers, I will bring shame and dishonor to myself;

3 To my mother and father;

4 To my friends and relatives;

5 To my community;

6 And I will not be able to live in the land of my fathers;

7 And the rest of my days on earth will be unhappy.

8 Therefore, I must do what is right on earth.

Chapter 8

(The Lord appears for the fourth and last time; Adam tells Him of his decision.)

1 And on a certain day, the Lord descended upon Adam and spoke:

2 Adam, where are you going? And Adam answered:

3 I am going off to war!

4 So that I will not bring shame and dishonor to myself;

5 To my mother and father;

6 To my friends and relatives;

7 To my community;

8 And so that I will be able to live in the land of my fathers;

9 And so that the rest of my days on earth will be happy.

Chapter 9

(The Lord replies to Adam's decision.)

1 And the Lord replied to Adam:

2 You have decided not to live according to my likeness and image in which I made you,

3 And you will not be going about your business as I have commanded you,

4 And you will go to serve your rulers instead of me,

5 And you have not decided what was good in the sight of the Lord.

6 This is The Evaluation of Peace on Earth.

ROBERT L. CHARPENTIER

IMPROVISATION #34

TO SISERO

*wailing shades approach starlings:
stalk,*

*stalactite,
elevator shaft
wheel into hades through winterglass –
one, etched as grass into a throat;
two, swollen in limestone draught
held in dark resemblance;
three, throbbed into a geometric bloat.*

*as desperate
as tooth under sheath,
sword under lip,
starlings, frozen on separate
perches,
plunge into laryngeal perspective;
their flaming feathers slip
to ash.*

PAUL MERLUZZO

URCHIN

*she had a huge oval
vacuum in her mouth,
as if she was
about to vomit forth
castanets
with each ticking word . . .
stepping over such punctured vocabulary
(for i too, clicked
as i spoke to the splintered child)
we drew in sharp breaths
and transacted
a desperate and fragile sale
of christmas candles . . .*

PAUL MERLUZZO

ON THE OCCASION OF THE HORSE

*helpless arms reach towards the sky
empty save for the love they possess
when they cry deaf ears receive their pleas
and blinded vision greets their tears*

*falling silently towards an eclipsed sun
they sympathize with others already there; and pray to the
one who cast them into this void of darkness*

*muted sobs and strains of penitence stain the sky
with their thin streaks of blackened tears.*

*While in the sun's warmth, gently ebbing
waters wash the shore and erase the
traces of those who had soiled her
pure, white sands . . .*

*and those that are left bathe their souls
removing the dark which had so often
shaded their lives.*

*and then he comes
and they climb upon his back to be carried
to a land in which the darkness will
no longer close their eyes.
is it the beginning or is it the end they know not
but they ride blindly . . . hoping.*

JOSEPH MOCKAITIS

RAMBLE

(8 Sept. 1969)

*Babel as you tower over
weeping children,
what is your scheme?
Babel too-long silent,
red-smudged-black by age,
You stand tall,
resting, cramping quarters —
sleeping children and tears*

*Oh I love to watch the sky
Today it glares white,
but tomorrow it will be blue,
Tomorrow, and tomorrow
and the winds blow briskly through
the trees,
You know Maples are beautiful in the rain
So clean and pure
Yet saddened by the change they turn
their backs*

*to try and hide their tears
from my window gaze*

*and so with hands attempting to
eradicate the illness from my eyes,
gentle mistaken mother it is only
evil (real) that your love denies
For a moment I feel secure
but mother he will not leave me
long
for your meddling will but stall
his fury, and
keep me pent up within the storm*

*he looms large,
yes his eternity frightens me
and you will probably die
before him
leaving he-eternity and me.
So all your good intentions will
not clot the precious blood
that soon someday will flow from your
wounds down to the mud.
The meaning now,
I am certain
comes only from the Death
for with Then behind you, the
rest makes eternal sense.*

*So Babel gloat if it pleases you
for the sky shall be your home
but its color is quick-turning —
going marker — going home
the time is not long to wait now
the rain shall come again.
and I shall play amidst your
ashes
and
remember, eternal, then . . .*

JIM GOODHUE

GARBAGE MEN

*Cracking the cosmic intercourse of
credo, crowds and clowns
merry-mingled garbage men hurry to haul
the heavenly harlequin exigencies
from earth to sky and down into
gigantic tanks of purity
Like a seagull free he goes
censoring the world
the height of presumption in his mind
to compose the cosmos pure.*

WILLIAM MAAIA

WORK

*stuffed in raincoat, hat
briefcase clutching his hand
criteria: the office on time
denouement: the office on time*

*occupied arm chair
speaks to solemn steno
clever telephone judgement
fifty thou. mindful*

*pen wounding blue
now signs papers
spectacles do not notice
the name written*

MICHAEL PAUL

AMPLE APPLE

*Off of three white skinned castrated crutches
Dangled the bitten apple.
One could easily perceive the progress of the rot.
The exposed fruit was turning a cancerous brown
But some do-gooder
In the name of conservation, I suppose,
Had seen fit to glaze the ill-fated glob
With Plastic? Glycerine?
Or worsted wax?
So, as a direct result, it glowed
A healthy, screaming vivid, unctuous,
Pervasive, Max Factor, ruby red.*

*Only Rose Begonia would know, for sure,
For certain, the apple is dead.
And the three white crutches*

*In cocky arrogance
Stand on their heads, missing only their rubber ends,
Honor guard for a silent, scarlet, sered,
pathologically-infected, post-mortem piece of pulp.*

JAMES BRUNET

A SUNDAY IN MARCH

*Our fathers always drive us,
by mistake,
Into a deep lake.*

*The vehicle swerves,
And a wheel catches the near bank,
And the father's son dies,
with the father.*

Ahab hated that sort of thing.

STEPHEN DUCLOS

OUT OF ORDER

*Standing in a phonebooth
at 2 a.m.
the rain
the unsteady streetlight
and me
empty pockets
empty soul
empty thoughts
a day gone
another on its way
the wind shakes the wires
the phonebooth door squeaks
the yellow sign reads
"Temporarily Out of Order"
I stuck it on my back
and wandered home
in the crying rain
alone.*

T.L. PARTRIDGE

ECOLOGY

(to mother earth)

*I love
All living things,
For life
Is a thing
We all have
In common.*

ROY PETER CLARK

